HOT BAND: Coldplay's "Clocks" won the 2003 Grammy Award for Record of the Year.

easy fingerpicking

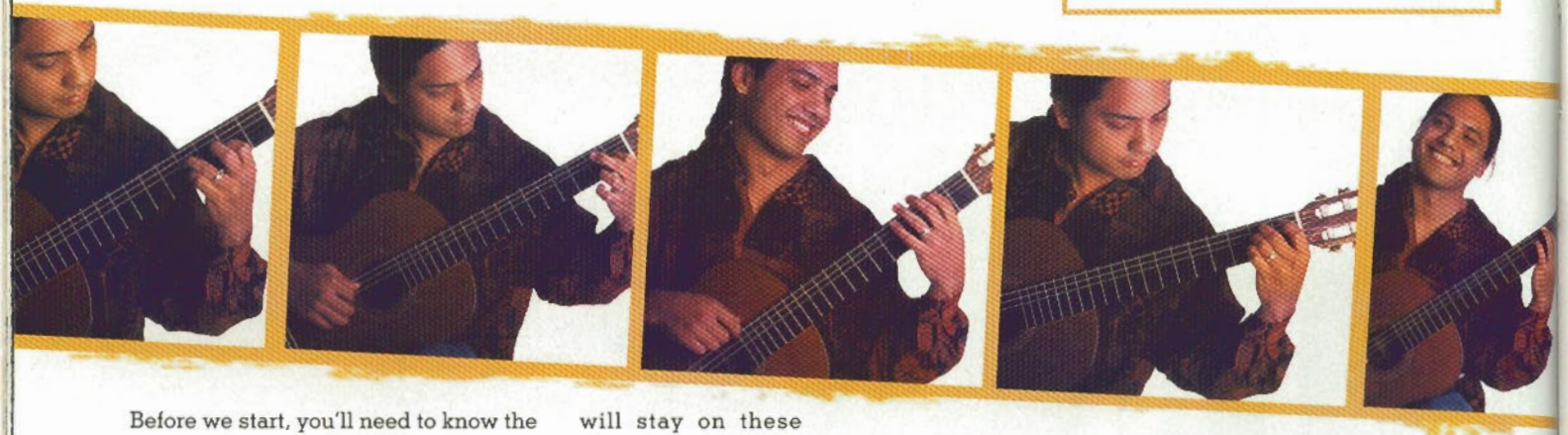
Unlock the flowing rhythm of Coldplay's "Clocks" with one simple pattern

PHOTO BY MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

BY ANDREW DuBROCK

COLDPLAY'S CLIMB to superstardom began in 2000 with its hit single "Yellow." Since then, the British foursome have charmed critics with their melodic pop, crisscrossed the world on huge tours, and even brushed shoulders with a movie star or two along the way. The band's sophomore effort, *A Rush of Cold Blood to the Head,* built on the success of "Yellow" with five standout tracks: "In My Place," "The Scientist," "Green Eyes," "Warning Sign," and "Clocks." We've only got enough space in these pages to print one tune, so we'll look at "Clocks." With its simple chords and repeating pattern, it's a perfect launchpad for learning to fingerpick. We can't guarantee it'll land you a movie star date, but it will certainly help convince potential sweethearts that you really can play guitar!

DAVID DUEÑAS BEGAN PLAYING the guitar at age 12 at the Guam Academy of Music and Arts. He has performed throughout the US and in Europe. He teaches at Santa Clara University in California.



Before we start, you'll need to know the common way right-hand fingers are labeled in guitar notation:

p=thumb
i=index
m=middle
a=ring

If you're trying to figure out where the *p* in thumb is, you're not the first English-speaking person to wonder. The letters refer to Spanish words used in classical notation: *p* is for *pulgar*, *i* is for *indice*, *m* is for *medio*, and *a* is for *anular*. We're not going to use your ring finger (*a*) in this lesson, but it'll likely make an appearance in your future fingerpicking career.

Basic Patterns

Now that you know why *p* means thumb, let's put those fingers to work. Look at Example 1 on page 21. First, form a D chord with your left hand (if you're not sure how to make a D chord shape, see page 12). Next, rest the fingers of your right hand on the strings [illegible] will stay on these strings throughout the whole song, so once you get comfortable playing on these strings, you are well on your way.

A Look at Rhythm

Let's take a moment to check out the rhythm in Example 1. Here, you are picking quarter notes *on the beat*. That means that if you tapped your foot along with your fingers (or counted "one two three four") in this example, you would tap at the exact same time you picked each string. Once you're comfortable tapping along, let's add in the thumb, as shown in Example 2. The symbol at the end of the measure is a *rest* (a quarter-note rest, to be exact) which means you don't play anything on the fourth beat (your foot will tap all by itself).

In Example 3, we're going to get rid of the rest and just repeat those three notes over and over. (The thick double bars and dots that bracket either end of this and the [illegible] play the next note with your index finger more lightly, then reach down for the note with your thumb and accent that one, and so on. The tough part here is that you'll be accenting *different* fingers at different times. Just keep trying it; I promise it'll get easier with the next example.

Why is it going to get easier? Well, now you're going to play eighth notes. This means that you're going to play *two* notes for every time you tap your foot. This also means that *every* time you tap your foot you'll accent a note. Play Example 5 and see what I'm talking about.

Finding and Changing Chords

OK, let's get comfortable fingerpicking that same pattern on the other chords you'll need for "Clocks." Example 6 applies the pattern to an A-minor chord (Am), and Example 7 applies it to an E-minor (Em) chord (see page 15 if you need to review those chord shapes). Now [illegible]

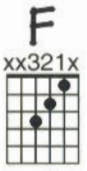
this means you'll "let go" of the first chord a little early. Check out Example 9 on page 22: the last note of every measure is an open third string. As you pick it, release your left hand and use that half second to get your left-hand fingers in place for the next chord. You may notice that the open string is a different note than you'd normally play for the D or Am chord, but never fear: it sounds just fine. Once you've mastered the D–Am switch, try changing between Am and Em (Example 10) and between Em and D (Example 11). In Em, that last picked note is an open string anyway, so those switches should be a little easier.

With that cool chord-changing shortcut as fodder for thought, you may wonder: why bother making the full chord shapes at all when you're only picking some of the fretted notes? The answer is that you might as well, since it will set you up for some cool fingerpicking patterns (including one more in this article) that *do* use more of those fretted notes.

A New Chord

You now have all the chords under your belt to play the verses and choruses of "Clocks," but when you reach the bridge section, you'll find an F chord staring you down.

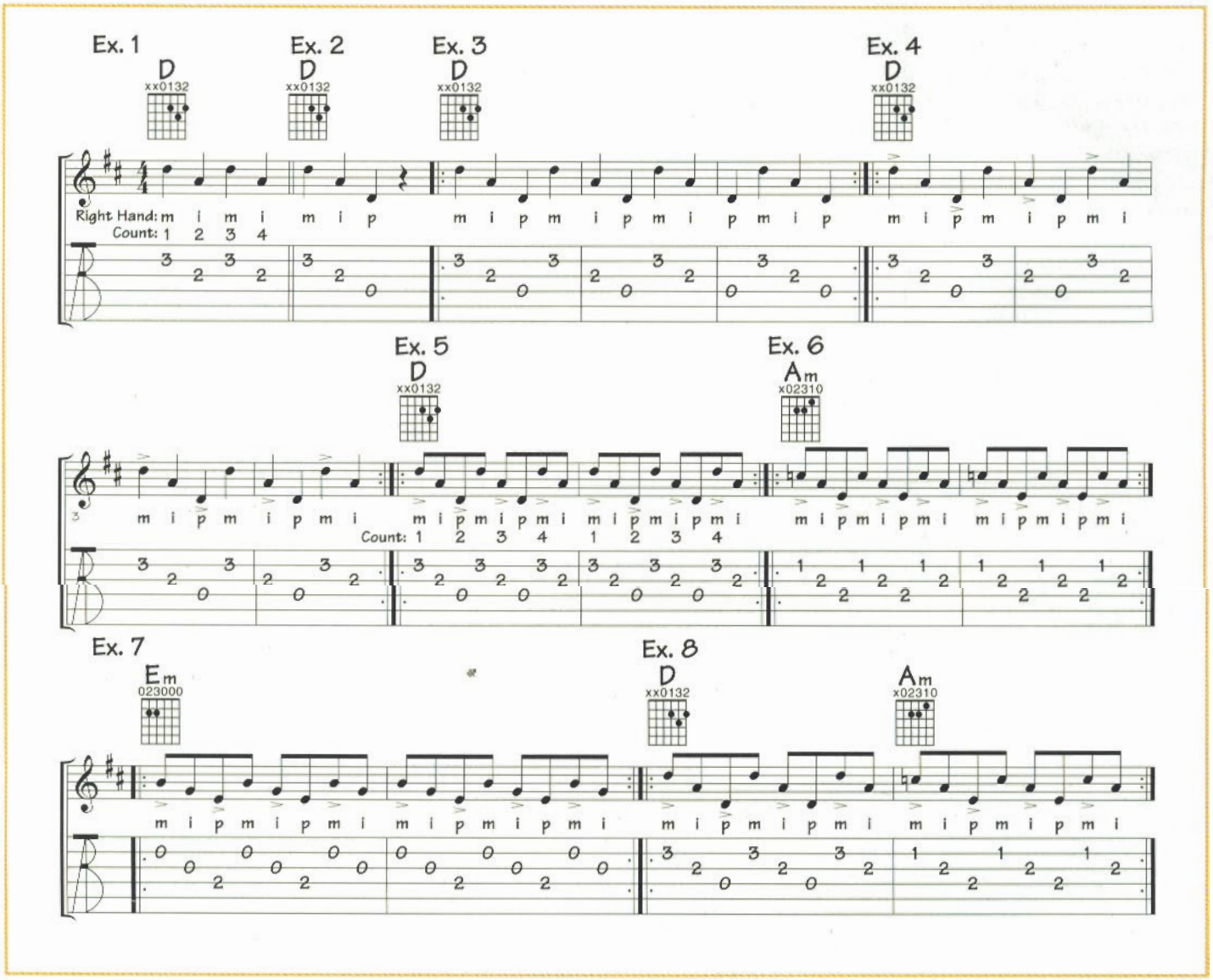
To make it, place your left index finger on the first fret of the second string, your middle finger on the second fret of the third string, and your ring finger on the



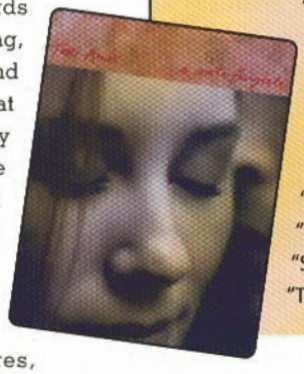
third fret of the fourth string. (You may have seen this chord with the first finger also playing the first fret of the first string, kind of flattened across the fingerboard to get two notes. If you already play this chord, go ahead and play it, but you don't really need that top note for the pattern we're using.) Now you're ready for Example 12, which applies our fingerpicking pattern to this F chord. Examples 13 and 14 apply the pattern to the other two chords in the bridge—C and G.

Here We Go

Now let's look at the complete transcription of "Clocks" on page 24. You can play through the piece just fine using the pat-


Ex. 1
D
xx0132
Ex. 2
D
xx0132
Ex. 3
D
xx0132
Ex. 4
D
xx0132
Right Hand: m i m i m i p m i p m i p m i p m i p m i p m i p m i
Count: 1 2 3 4
Ex. 5
D
xx0132
Ex. 6
Am
x02310
m i p m i p m i m i p m i p m i m i p m i p m i m i p m i p m i
Count: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
Ex. 7
Em
023000
Ex. 8
D
xx0132
Am
x02310
m i p m i p m i m i p m i p m i m i p m i p m i m i p m i p m i

tern you've already learned, but the sharp-eyed among you will spy some notes (the ones with the stems going down) that we haven't talked about yet. These notes spice up our pattern a bit, and to play them you have to use a technique called a *pinch*. This move requires your thumb to pluck a bass string at the same time as your middle finger plays its note. Try it and you'll feel the pinching motion that's required. For the D and F chords the thumb picks the fourth string, for the Am and C it's the fifth, and for the Em and G the sixth. That may sound difficult, but the only difference between this and the pattern you've learned is that here your thumb also plays on the first beat.



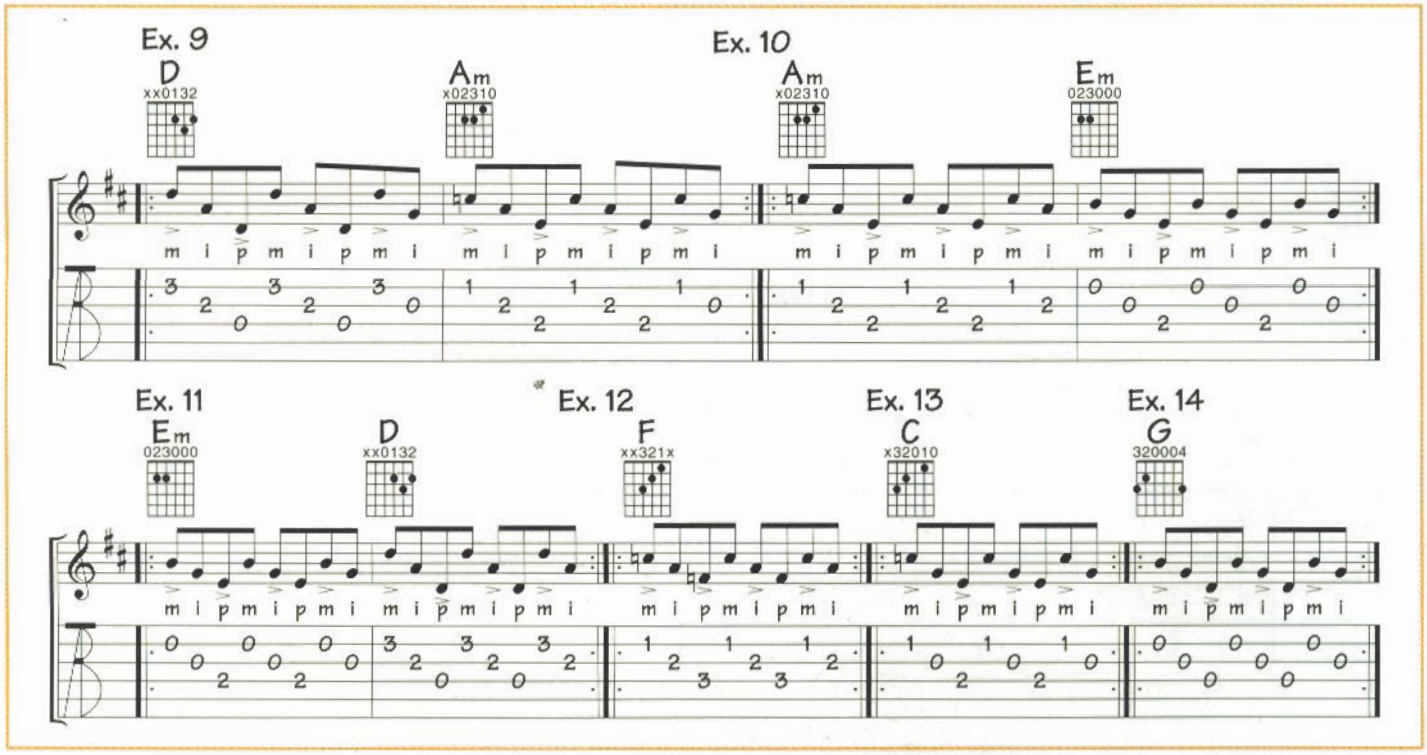
So, whether you pinch or not, start picking "Clocks" by playing the first four measures, then repeat them. (On the recording, Coldplay plays this intro for twice as long, but they've got the benefit of a dramatic piano intro and gradual band buildup.) Next, play the first verse and chorus with that same repeating pattern underneath. At the end of the first chorus, you'll run into the marking "D.C. (first time)." D.C. stands for *da capo*, which means "from the beginning" in Italian, so go back to the very beginning of the song. Play all the way through the intro, second verse, and second chorus, until you hit that D.C. mark again. This time, continue on through the extended chorus. After that chorus, you'll reach the bridge—the first (and only) time you'll play the F–C–G progression. After the bridge, return to that old familiar D–Am–Em progression to close out with the last chorus.

You did it! Now you're ready to serenade your sweetie from behind the bushes with your new fingerpicking skills. If you want to play this in the same key Coldplay does, put a capo on the first fret—or try putting it in different places until the key is comfortable for your singing voice.

Other Fingerpicking Songs

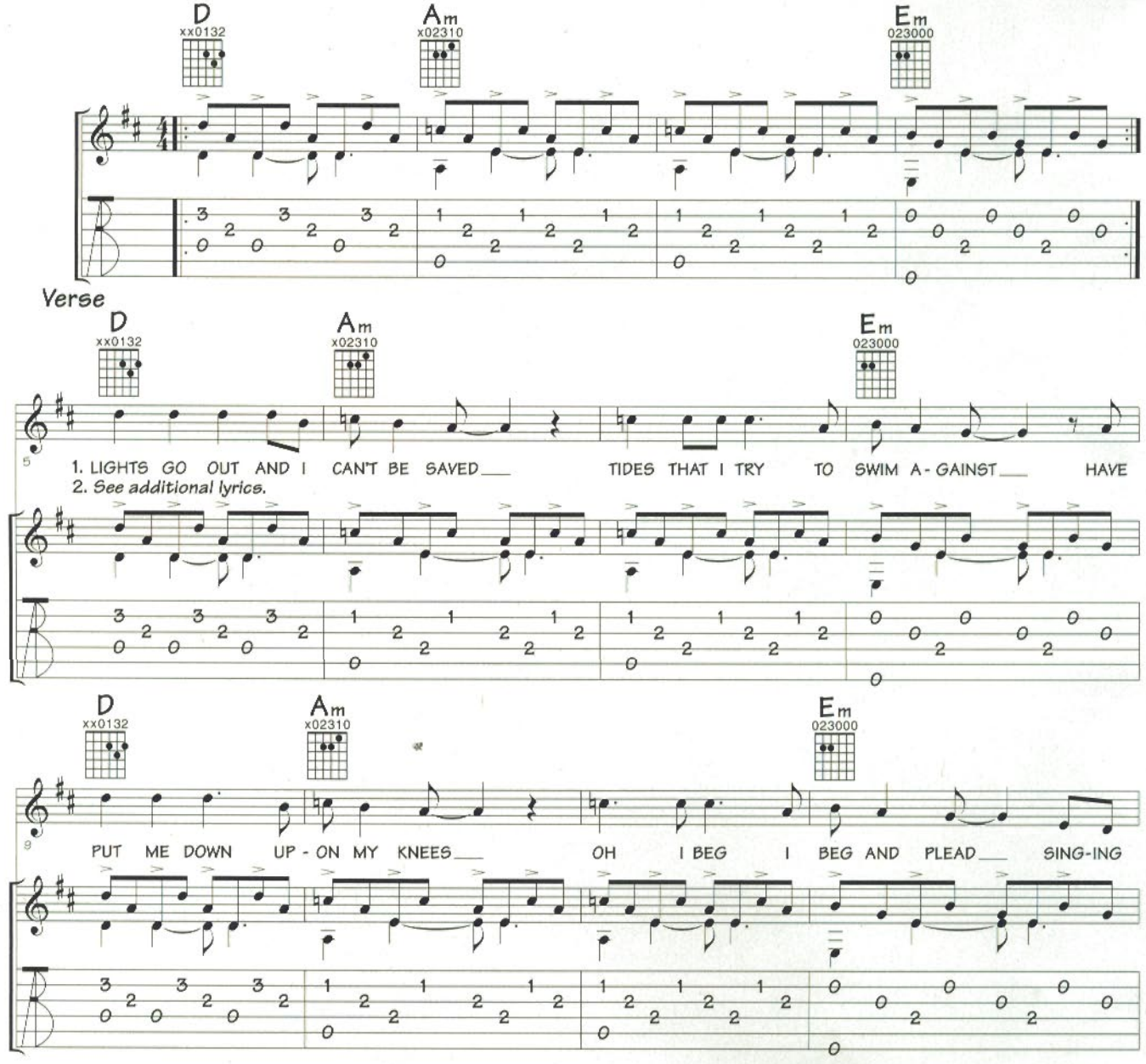
If you're scouting around for songs to play fingerstyle, you've got endless options—from classical and folk to blues, jazz, and pop—and you don't have to open just the "acoustic guitar" drawer to find them. For example, "Clocks" was originally played on piano, but it sounds great on an acoustic guitar. At a loss for where to start? Here are a few songs that would work well:

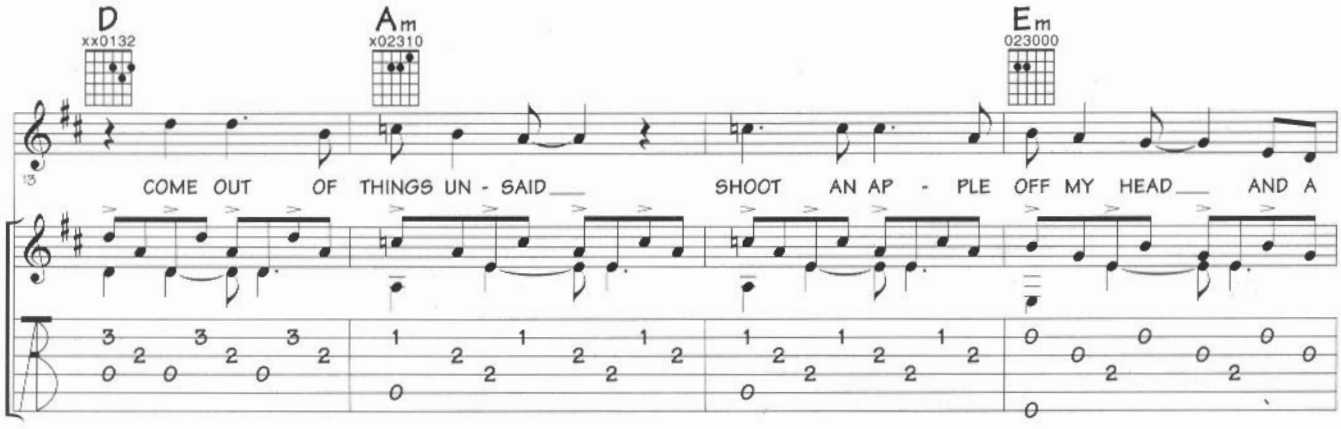
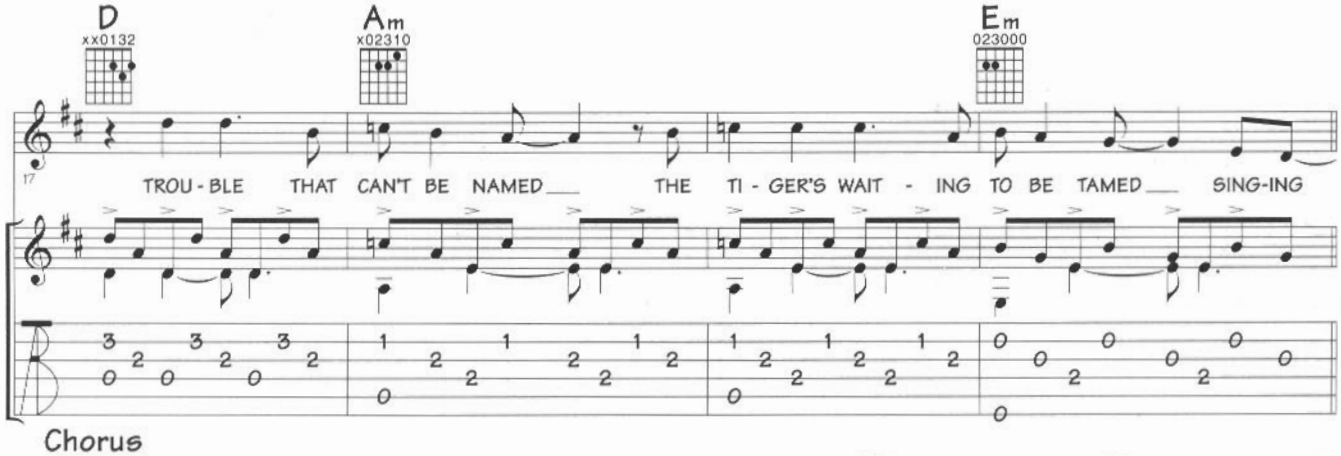
"A Sorta Fairytale" by Tori Amos
"Drops of Jupiter" by Train
"Fly Away" by Lenny Kravitz
"Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" by Green Day
"Hey Jude" by the Beatles
"Johnny B. Goode" by Chuck Berry
"One of Us" by Joan Osborne
"The Middle" by Jimmy Eat World
"Sweet Child o' Mine" by Guns 'n' Roses
"The Weight" by the Band

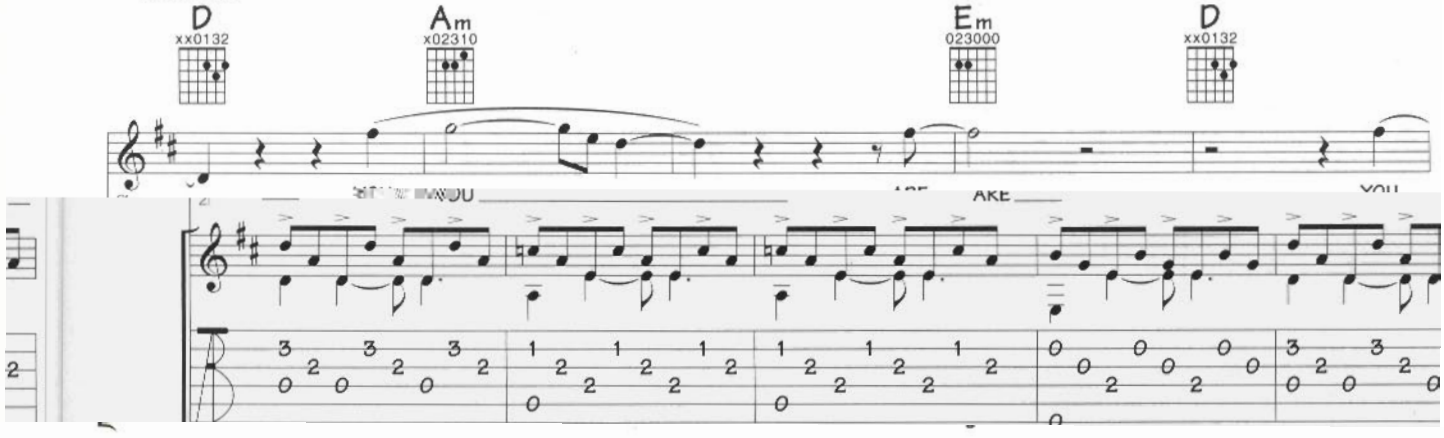
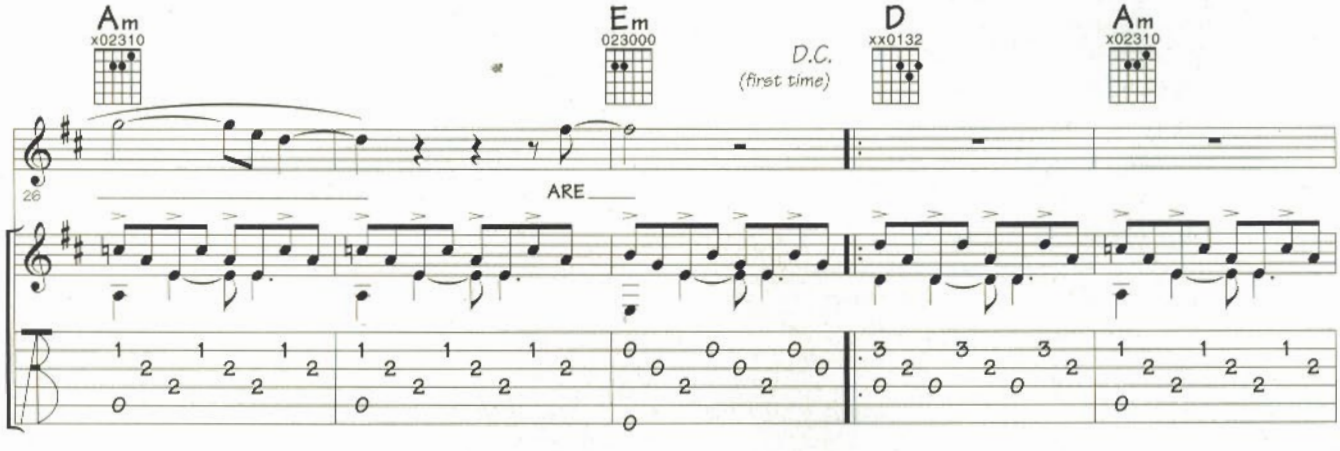


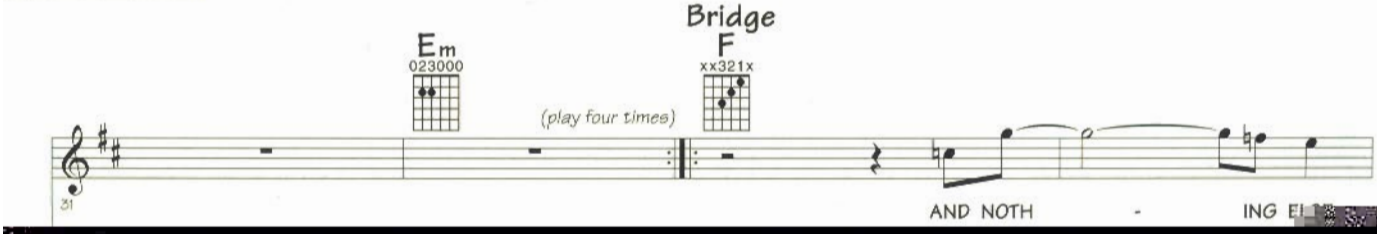
CLOCKS

Words and music by Guy Berryman,
Jon Buckland, Will Champion, and Chris Martin

Chords: D xx0132, Am x02310, Em 023000, F xx321x, C x32010, G 320004

D
Am
Em
Verse
1. LIGHTS GO OUT AND I CAN'T BE SAVED TIDES THAT I TRY TO SWIM A-GAINST HAVE
2. See additional lyrics.
PUT ME DOWN UP-ON MY KNEES OH I BEG I BEG AND PLEAD SING-ING

© 2002 BMG MUSIC PUBLISHING LTD. ALL RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES ADMINISTERED BY CAREERS-BMG MUSIC PUBLISHING, INC.
INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT SECURED. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF HAL LEONARD CORPORATION.

D
xx0132
Am
x02310
Em
023000
13
COME OUT OF THINGS UN - SAID
SHOOT AN AP - PLE OFF MY HEAD
AND A

D
xx0132
Am
x02310
Em
023000
17
TROU - BLE THAT CAN'T BE NAMED
THE TI - GER'S WAIT - ING TO BE TAMED
SING-ING

Chorus

D
xx0132
Am
x02310
Em
023000
D
xx0132

Am
x02310
Em
023000
D
xx0132
Am
x02310
D.C.
(first time)
26
ARE



OH I BEG, I BEG AND PLEAD
SINGING "COME OUT OF THINGS UNSAID"
SHOOT AN APPLE OFF MY HEAD
AND A TROUBLE THAT CAN'T BE NAMED
THE TIGER'S WAITING TO BE TAMED, SINGING

Chorus
YOU ARE, YOU ARE

2. CONFUSION NEVER STOPS
CLOSING WALLS AND TICKING CLOCKS
GONNA COME BACK AND TAKE YOU HOME
I COULD NOT STOP, THAT YOU NOW KNOW
SINGING "COME OUT UPON MY SEAS"
CURSE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES
AM I A PART OF THE CURE
OR AM I PART OF THE DISEASE, SINGING

YOU ARE, YOU ARE

Bridge
AND NOTHING ELSE COMPARES
OH NO NOTHING ELSE COMPARES
AND NOTHING ELSE COMPARES

YOU ARE, YOU ARE
HOME, HOME, WHERE I WANTED TO GO
HOME, HOME, WHERE I WANTED TO GO
HOME, HOME, WHERE I WANTED TO GO
HOME, HOME, WHERE I WANTED TO GO